

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/COC/MR
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PP RUEHC

DE RUMJIR 26352/1 1421100

ZNY CCCCC

P 221020Z MAY 67

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY

INFO RUMTBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

RUHHHQA/CINCPAC FOR POLAD

RUMJF S/AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 26352

LIMDIS

REF : A. SAIGON 19123

B. SAIGON 26245

C. SAIGON 23748

SUBJ: CANDIDACY OF TRAN VAN HUONG

1. LEADING CIVILIAN CANDIDATE AND FORMER PREMIER TRAN VAN HUONG TOLD EMBOFF MAY 21 THAT HE PLANS TO MAKE FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS CANDIDACY FOR PRESIDENT THIS WEEK. HUONG IS NOT ENTIRELY

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HAPPY WITH THE ELECTORAL LAW, BUT HE SAID THAT MANY GROUPS HAVE PRESSED HIM TO RUN REGARDLESS. AFTER A LONG STRUGGLE WITH HIMSELF, HE HAS DECIDED THAT COME WHAT MAY - "A GOOD ELECTION OR A BAD ONE", A FAIR COMPETITION OR A RACE IN WHICH SOME CANDIDATES USE DISHONEST TACTICS - HE WILL RUN.

2. HUONG SAID THAT HE WILL NAME HIS CHOICE FOR VICE PRESIDENT AT THE SAME TIME THAT HE ANNOUNCES HIS CANDIDACY. HE DECLINED TO NAME THE MAN, BUT SAID THAT HIS VICE PRESIDENTIAL RUNNING MATE IS CIVILIAN, BUDDHIST AND WELL KNOWN FOR HIS INTEGRITY.

3. ASKED ABOUT REPORTS THAT BOTH GENERAL THIEU AND GENERAL KY HAVE ASKED HIM TO RUN WITH THEM AS A CANDIDATE FOR VICE PRESIDENT, HUONG DENIED FLATLY THAT ANY SUCH APPROACHES HAVE BEEN MADE. WHEN EMBOFF EXPRESSED SURPRISE, HUONG STUCK TO HIS DENIAL. HE FURTHER SAID THAT HIS POLITICAL POSITION AS A "SYMBOL" OF THE SOUTH, ELDER TO BOTH KY AND

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THIEU, AND KNOWN AS A MAN OF INTEGRITY MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO RUN WITH EITHER KY OR THIEU. COMMENTING ON THE

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RUMOR CURRENT IN SAIGON THAT GENERAL THIEU MIGHT RUN AS HIS VICE PRESIDENT, HUONG SAID THAT THIS IS ALSO OUT OF THE QUESTION BECAUSE THIEU COULD NOT STEP DOWN FROM CHIEF OF STATE TO RUN FOR THE LOWER OFFICE OF VICE PRESIDENT.

4. ASKED ABOUT REPORTS THAT HE MIGHT WITHDRAW IN FAVOR OF PHAN KHAC SUU OR VICE VERSA, HUONG SAID THAT IN HIS OPINION SUU WOULD NOT GET MANY OF HIS VOTERS IF HE WERE TO WITHDRAW. LIKEWISE, SUU'S WITHDRAWAL WOULD NOT HELP HIM MATERIALLY. HUONG OBSERVED THAT HE AND SUU ARE OLD FRIENDS BUT THEY HAVE "DIFFERENT WAYS OF WORKING". HE COMPARED HIMSELF AND SUU TO TWO DOCTORS CONFRONTED BY A SICK PATIENT. BOTH WANT TO CURE THE PATIENT, BUT THEY RECOMMEND DIFFERENT TREATMENTS WITHOUT SAYING SO DIRECTLY, HUONG ALSO IMPLIED THAT HE CONSIDERS SUU WEAK AND INDECISIVE.

5. HUONG STRESSED THE PROBLEM OF CORRUPTION AND THE GENERAL DECLINE OF MORALE IN VIET NAM. HE OBSERVED THAT THERE IS ALSO CORRUPTION ON THE AMERICAN SIDE, THAT DESPITE MASSIVE AID AND GREAT SACRIFICES, THE AMERICAN EFFORT TO HELP SOUTH

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VIET NAM IS MARRIED BY SOME LOWER LEVEL PERSONNEL WHO THINK ONLY OF PERSONAL PROFIT. ASKED IF HE EXPECTS CORRUPTION TO BE A MAJOR ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN, HUONG LAUGHED AND SAID THAT IT WOULD STIR UP MUCH TROUBLE.

6. COMMENTING ON THE POSSIBILITY THAT PEACE AND THE AMERICAN PRESENCE MAY FIGURE AS ISSUES IN THE CAMPAIGN, HUONG SAID THAT PEACE MUST BE HONESTLY AND CLEARLY DISCUSSED. THE PEACE ISSUE MUST BE HANDLED SO AS TO AVOID MISUNDERSTANDINGS; IT MUST BE MADE CLEAR THAT THE PROBLEM IS TO FIND A WAY TO A JUST PEACE WHICH GUARANTEES THE INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM OF SOUTH VIET NAM. HE GAVE NO SPECIFICS ON HOW HE THINKS SUCH A PEACE MIGHT BE ACHIEVED. AS FOR THE AMERICAN PRESENCE, HUONG BRUSHED THE MATTER ASIDE BY SAYING THAT NO RESPONSIBLE

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CANDIDATE WOULD CALL FOR THE AMERICANS TO PULL OUT.

7. HUONG SAID AT ONE POINT THAT MILITARY-CIVILIAN COOPERATION IS ESSENTIAL IF THE NEW GOVERNMENT IS TO BE EFFECTIVE. HE OBSERVED WITH A SMILE THAT HE HAS HAD SOME EXPERIENCE WITH THIS PROBLEM: IT WAS THE MACHINATIONS OF GENERAL KHANH THAT

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CAUSED THE DOWNFALL OF HIS GOVERNMENT. ASKED HOW HE WOULD TRY TO BRING ABOUT MILITARY-CIVILIAN COOPERATION IF HE WERE ELECTED, HUONG SAID THAT HE WOULD NAME MILITARY MEN TO SOME CABINET POSITIONS AND ALSO USE THEM AS ADVISORS. HE ADDED THAT HIS CHOICE OF A PRIME MINISTER WOULD NOT BE BASED ON THE NEED FOR MILITARY PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNMENT, BUT RATHER HE WOULD SELECT HIS PRIME MINISTER WITH REGARD TO THE MAN'S ABILITY TO DO THE JOB.

8. IN DISCUSSING THE ELECTORAL LAW, HUONG WAS CRITICAL OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR AN INTRODUCTION BY 30 CA DEPUTIES OR MEMBERS OF PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS. HE BELIEVES THAT THE PROVISION IS CONTRARY TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL STATEMENT THAT CITIZENS MAY RUN FREELY FOR OFFICE. HUONG ALSO DEPLORED THE FAILURE TO PROVIDE FOR A RUN-OFF ELECTION. HE THINKS THAT THE PRESIDENT MUST HAVE OVER 50 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN ORDER TO CLAIM A REAL MANDATE. THIS WILL BE IMPORTANT WHEN THE TIME COMES TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE COMMUNISTS.

9. EMBOFF ASKED HUONG IF THE SAIGON RUMOR THAT TRI QUANG

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IS BACKING HIM IS TRUE. HUONG SAID THAT HE HAS HAD NO CONTACT WITH TRI QUANG OR HIS SUPPORTERS. HE SAID THAT THE BUDDHIST EXTREMISTS ARE INFILTRATED BY THE COMMUNISTS. THE "STRUGGLE" OF LAST YEAR WAS INSPIRED BY THE VIET CONG. THE LETTER LEFT BEHIND BY PHAN THI MAI AFTER HER SELF-IMMOLATION THIS PAST WEEK IS OBVIOUSLY COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA, AND MAI HERSELF WAS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DRUGS WHEN SHE BURNED HERSELF TO DEATH. SUCH AN IMMOLATION IS REALLY MURDER.

10. ON HIS HEALTH, HUONG DECLARED THAT HE IS QUITE FIT. THE LONG REST IN VUNG TAU HAS MADE HIM STRONGER THAN WHEN HE WAS PRIME MINISTER. AT ANOTHER POINT IN THE CONVERSATION, HOWEVER, HUONG SAID THAT HE WAS VERY TIRED FROM HAVING MET WITH SO MANY PEOPLE IN THE COURSE OF THE PAST FEW

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11. AS IN THE CONVERSATION REPORTED REFERENCE A, HUONG
REFERRED TO HIMSELF AS A SIMPLE MAN OF THE PEOPLE. HE ONCE
WORKED AS A COOLIE, HE SERVED LONG YEARS AS A CLERK TYPIST
IN GOVERNMENT OFFICES, AND HE HAS LIVED MOST OF HIS LIFE
IN PAILLOTE HUTS.

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12. HUONG SAID THAT A COMMITTEE OF HIS SUPPORTERS WILL RUN HIS CAMPAIGN. FORMER MINISTER OF YOUTH VO LONG TRIEU WILL BE ON THE COMMITTEE, BUT HE WILL NOT CHAIR IT. IF THE COMMITTEE HAS A HEAD, IT WILL BE HUYNH VAN DAO, CHIEF OF CABINET IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. ALTHOUGH HE WILL ANNOUNCE HIS CANDIDACY THIS WEEK, HUONG DOES NOT PLAN TO COME TO SAIGON UNTIL MID-JUNE. THE COMMITTEE WILL ORGANIZE HIS CAMPAIGN IN THE MEANTIME.

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12. COMMENT: (A) ALTHOUGH HUONG DID NOT NAME HIS VICE PRESIDENTIAL RUNNING MATE, WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT IT WILL BE MAI THO TRUYEN (REFERENCE B). TRUYEN FITS THE DESCRIPTION, AND WE KNOW THAT HUONG AND HIS SUPPORTERS HAVE BEEN URGING TRUYEN TO RUN. REFERENCE B SUGGESTS THAT TRUYEN WAS STILL DEBATING THE MATTER MAY 20, BUT THAT HE WAS THEN CLOSE TO A DECISION. HUONG TOLD EMBOFF THAT HIS RUNNING MATE HAD BEEN WITH HIM SEVERAL HOURS EARLIER ON MAY 21; TRUYEN MAY WELL HAVE AGREED TO RUN AT THAT SESSION.

(B) IT WOULD SEEM THAT HUONG WAS LESS THAN COMPLETELY FRANK WHEN HE DENIED APPROACHES BY THIEU AND KY. TOLD EMBOFF APRIL 21 THAT SUCH APPROACHES HAD BEEN MADE (REFERENCE C).
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WHILE HUONG COULD STILL DECIDE TO RUN WITH EITHER KY OR THIEU, IT NOW SEEMS LIKELY THAT HE HAS DECIDED AGAINST SUCH A COURSE. HE PROBABLY BELIEVES THE PRESENT OPEN RIVALRY BETWEEN KY AND THIEU GREATLY IMPROVES HIS CHANCES TO WIN THE PRESIDENCY.

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(C) JUDGING FROM HIS REMARKS, HUONG PROBABLY MEANS TO
BASE HIS CAMPAIGN ON HIS IMAGE AS AN INCORRUPTIBLE MAN OF THE

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PEOPLE WHO CAN CLEAN UP THE GOVERNMENT AND RESTORE MORAL
FIBER TO THE SOCIETY. CORRUPTION IS THUS LIKELY TO BE A
MAJOR THOUGH PERHAPS NECESSARILY MUTED THEME OF HIS CAMPAIGN.

(C) ALTHOUGH HE SAID THAT HE IS QUITE WELL, HUONG
LOOKED HEAVIER AND MORE TIRED THAN DURING EMBOFF'S LAST
MEETING WITH HIM (REFERENCE A). HIS CONTINUED SOJOURN IN
VUNG TAU AND HIS REMARK THAT SO MANY MEETINGS HAVE TIRED HIM
AT LEAST PLACES IN QUESTION WHETHER HE IS UP TO A VIGOROUS
CAMPAIGN, MUCH LESS THE DEMANDS OF THE PRESIDENCY.

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